

TRIALS THAT STRETCH US

2 Corinthians 8:1-3 ... "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing"

Today's scripture passage is from the second letter of Paul to his churches in Corinth. He is reporting to them that the churches in Macedonia, even though stricken with great poverty and trials that severely tested their faith, found their relationship with Christ to be enough to give them great joy AND to make them generous supporters of Paul's ministry. He later, in verse seven, challenges the believers of Corinth to be steadfast in their faith because they are relatively wealthy and face fewer trials.

Stretching is something most athletes understand. By stretching your muscles prior to running or competing, you condition them to handle the stress of your sport. You are less likely to experience cramps. The pliability of leather is improved by working and stretching it. Steel is strengthened through heat and stretching. Shoes become more comfortable when subjected to stretching as you wear them. The believers in Macedonia were undergoing some serious trials and testing that stretched their ability to endure and persevere. In fact, it stretched them so much, that they – even though poor – found ways to bless Paul and to support his ministry.

Sometimes you may experience tests and trials that are meant to correct a behavior God does not like. At other times you may experience a trial that is meant to teach you something. But, in some instances, God allows you to face trials that stretch you and increase your abilities and your perseverance. If you are experiencing a trial today, ask God what he wants you to learn. If he reveals a behavior that displeases him, ask for his help in changing. If God wants you to learn something from your experience, ask him what it is and be ready to accept the teaching. If God simply wants to increase your ability to withstand hardship and difficulty, welcome it because something may be on the horizon of your life in which that stretching will be useful.

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